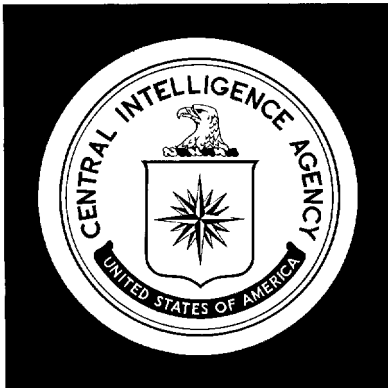


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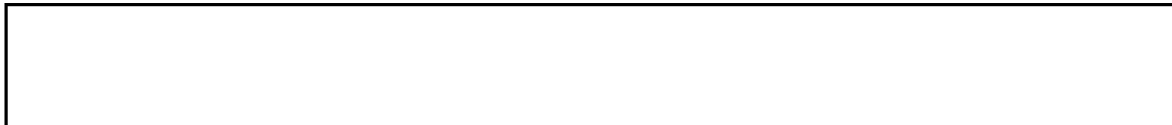
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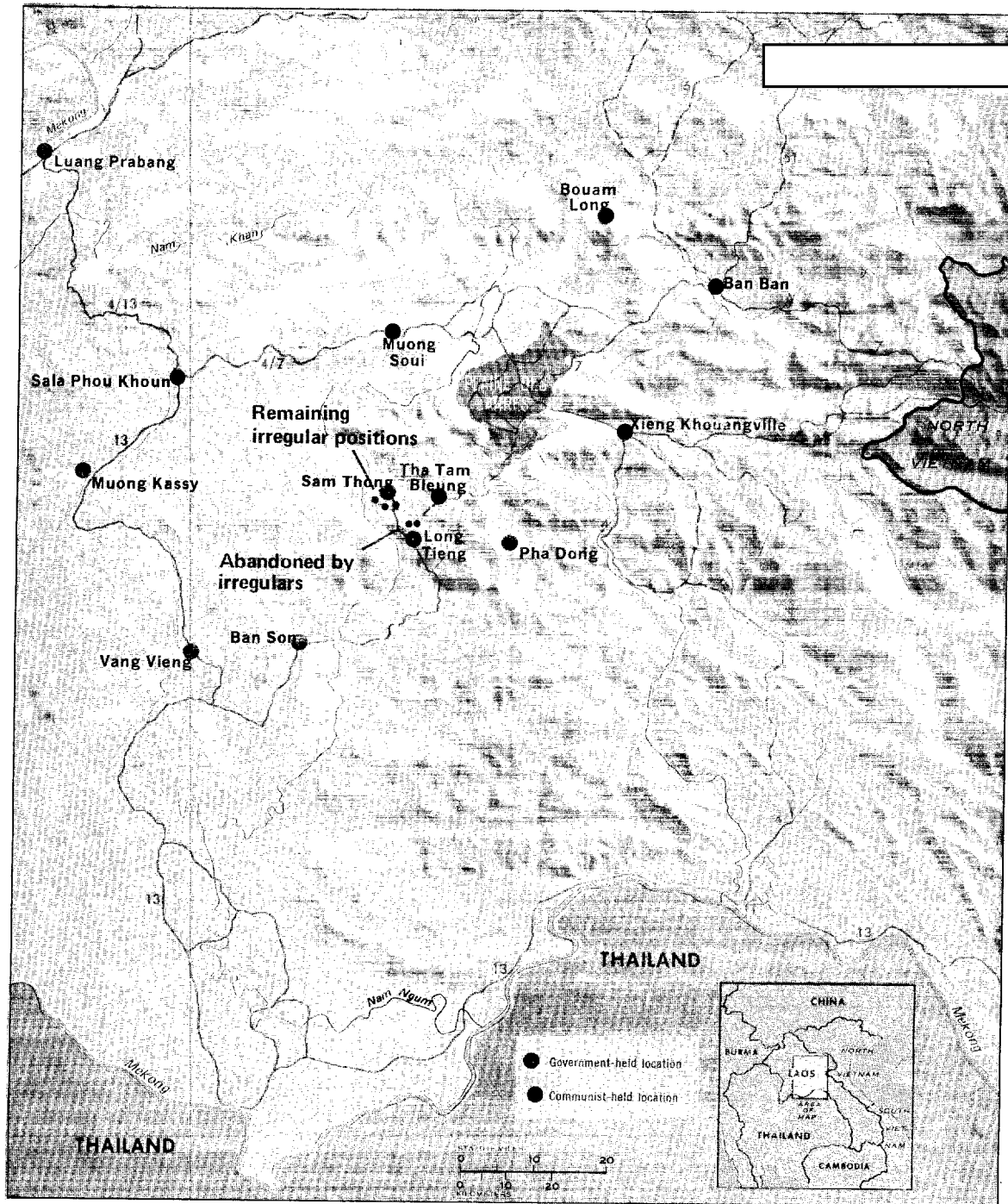
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LAOS



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LAOS: Fighting continues in the Long Tieng area.

An irregular battalion abandoned two defensive positions on Skyline Ridge overlooking Long Tieng following a Communist mortar attack on 14 March. Some Communist troops have evidently occupied the positions and government efforts to retake them have thus far failed. The remaining positions on Skyline have also been shelled, but the irregulars manning them have held their ground.

The North Vietnamese are also shelling the Long Tieng valley. Poor weather conditions have curtailed air strikes against the enemy gun positions north of the government complex.

Vang Pao has moved 120 fresh irregular troops from Pha Dong to attempt to retake the positions on Skyline Ridge. If the Communists dig in and move up reinforcements quickly, Vang Pao may find it necessary to divert more of the troops he had planned to use in operations in the Communists' rear areas. Over 650 of these troops were moved on 14 March from Pha Dong to Bouam Long in preparation for a strike at Communist supply lines northeast of the Plaine des Jarres.

To the northwest, irregulars holding the three remaining positions in the Sam Thong area have reported no significant activity since 11 March.



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JORDAN-ISRAEL: King Husayn will make public today a proposal that calls for West Bank autonomy after a peace settlement with Israel is achieved.

Husayn's plan calls for a Jordanian-Palestinian kingdom divided into two regions, with a Palestinian state west of the Jordan River. The formula would allow each region to control its internal affairs while a national government, under the King, would direct foreign policy, the military establishments, and other national interests. The new Palestinian state could also include other areas now occupied by Israel, thus allowing for the inclusion of the Gaza Strip.

Arab reactions to Husayn's proposal will be highly critical. Baghdad radio already has described the plan as a "treacherous sellout" of the Palestinian cause, and George Habbash, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said the "traitorous" King should be overthrown.

Until now King Husayn had rejected proposals for a separate Palestinian state or a federated kingdom, stating that his government and the citizens of both banks would determine together the final disposition of the West Bank after the Israelis withdrew. The change in the King's position probably was triggered, at least in part, by the Israelis scheduling elections in the West Bank. Husayn may fear that Palestinian participation in the administration of the West Bank would make eventual reimposition of Jordanian control over that area more difficult.

Baghdad radio is sniping at the King's plan as a "full peace agreement with Israel," but there are no indications that Husayn is trying to open negotiations with the Israelis at this time or that he anticipates an early settlement. Major obstacles to any Jordanian peace settlement with the Israelis

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still remain, the most important of which is the status of Jerusalem. Husayn's plan would locate the capital of the Palestinian state in East Jerusalem. Israel, on the other hand, has insisted that Jerusalem can never again be divided.

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Bangladesh Suffering Food Shortages



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BANGLADESH: Acute food shortages in parts of the country have begun to result in scattered unrest.

Government foodgrain stocks are less than half of the total on hand at this time last year, and holdings in traditionally deficit districts are drastically low. Although the local United Nations relief organization had promised as recently as last month to supply substantial amounts of grain during the rest of 1972, little has arrived, or is expected in the near future, because of the lead times required. Grain currently arriving at the ports or in harbor warehouses, moreover, has not gone upcountry where it is needed because of transport difficulties. Even if it could be moved, it would not solve the long-range problem because the amounts involved are relatively small. Only India has been able to move some grain into the affected areas because New Delhi has rebuilt rail connections severed after the 1965 war.

The local UN organization is beset with communications and coordination problems, particularly with its headquarters in New York. Proposals to New York, for example, to clear the country's two major ports of Chittagong and Chalna have yet to be acted on, with the result that on 13 March Sheikh Mujib told local UN representatives that he will accept a Soviet offer of salvage assistance.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh is flooded with representatives of more than 60 foreign aid agencies. Local relief officials, who have found that their own work is suffering because of the time they must spend with these volunteers, have decided that they will no longer receive such groups.

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Mujib claims that he is under considerable pressure because the people are expecting prompt and large-scale UN assistance. Bangladesh and UN officials report that food shortages have already triggered unrest in some areas. Government authorities in Dacca have specifically referred to difficulties in Faridpur District southwest of Dacca.



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ITALY: The election campaign, now gathering momentum, is widening divergencies within the center-left parties.

The Christian Democratic and Socialist parties, mainstays of governing center-left coalitions for a decade, are tending to go their separate ways and show greater internal conflicts than the other parties.

Bargaining for key spots on the ballot, always a troublesome chore for the heterogeneous Christian Democratic Party, is more worrisome than usual this year. Center and right-wing leaders, who showed gains with the party rank and file earlier this year, are unwilling to concede much to the left wing. They feel the party must move to the right to prevent the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement from making inroads among the electorate. The Socialists, on the other hand, are emphasizing their left wing and its orientation, attacking the alleged evils of "centrism."

Giorgio Almirante, the hard-driving founder of the neo-fascist party who was restored to elective office in 1969, is stressing his party's claim to be the true "national alternative of the right." With the evident intent of exploiting concern in Italy over the shrinking Western presence in the Mediterranean, the neo-fascists have gone outside their own ranks to choose Admiral Gino Birindelli to head their election list in Naples. Birindelli, NATO's former naval commander in the Mediterranean, was expelled from Malta for right-wing views last June.

The far-left Manifesto group has enlivened the campaign by choosing anarchist and tabloid hero Pietro Valpreda as a candidate. He is accused, but has never been tried, in connection with a bombing that killed 16 persons in Milan in 1969.

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The Communists' 13th Party Congress, now under way in Milan, has delayed party campaigning. In discussing electoral prospects, the Communists have shown concern about possible losses to the Manifesto group, but evidently hope to pick up some compensatory votes from the fading Soviet-supported Proletarian Socialists.

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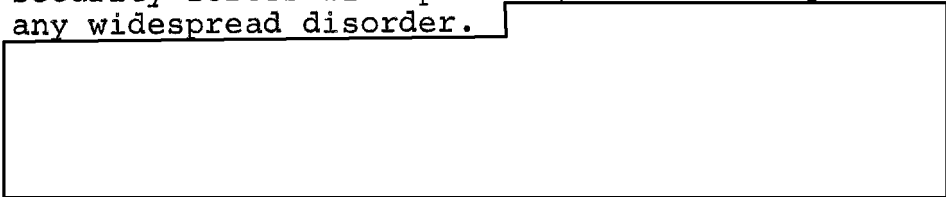
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NOTE

MAURITIUS: The government's arrest of leaders of the opposition Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) has sparked acts of violence. An explosion on 10 March damaged the approaches to a bridge over which Queen Elizabeth is to travel during a visit beginning on 24 March. Arsonists have set fire to a government labor office and to the home of a mayor. The actual perpetrators are unknown, but the arrest last week of the MMM's moderate leaders probably left the party's more radical cadres free to engage in terrorist acts. The arrests were carried out under emergency powers that the government had already used to suppress most overt MMM activity. Sporadic violence is likely to continue, but the island's security forces will probably be able to prevent any widespread disorder.



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